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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3170
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 5009
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 1288
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0549
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4116
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 9393
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6695
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 1214
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3627
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000693

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: PRESIDENT PROMISES DEVOLUTION...LATER

REF: A. 08 COLOMBO 000815

[1](#)B. 08 COLOMBO 000723

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES JAMES R. MOORE. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. President Mahinda Rajapaksa in a June 30 interview with The Hindu reaffirmed his willingness to pursue a political solution, but said he was waiting for two things: participation and cooperation of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and a fresh mandate from the people. The government's decision to shut down the Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP) has created uncertainty about the future of the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) and SCOPP Director Wijesinha told local media that the APRC would be given one month to complete its deliberations and submit its final report. On July 3, President Rajapaksa convened the inaugural session of the Presidential Committee on Development and Reconciliation, but Embassy contacts say the new committee was formed to mitigate domestic and international criticism over the lack of progress on a political solution and that they do not expect it to achieve significant results. Post will continue to impress on the GSL that meaningful progress toward power sharing, devolution and reconciliation should be a current, rather than future, priority. END SUMMARY.

PROMISES CONTINUE, BUT TIMELINE SLIPS

[1](#)2. (U) President Mahinda Rajapaksa in a June 30 interview with The Hindu reaffirmed his willingness to pursue a political solution, but said he was waiting for two things: participation and cooperation of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and a fresh mandate from the people. Rajapaksa told the Hindu that a political solution will come after his re-election as President, but did not indicate when a presidential election might be held. (Note: The election could be held as early as November 2009, and many observers expect it will take place in early 2010.) He cautioned, however, that the TNA must "know that they can't get what they want" and that there is "no way for federalism in this country." He added that his idea of a second chamber of parliament was intended to get representatives from the

provinces involved in national policy-making, and reiterated his desire not to "impose any arrangement" on the country. When asked about foreign concerns over triumphalism in Sri Lanka, the President said he was not worried because "the Tamils are happy, the Muslims are happy." He also argued that the perception that the presidency has become too powerful is inaccurate and that he has power only over security matters.

APRC RUNNING OUT OF TIME

¶3. (U) The government's decision to shut down the Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process has created uncertainty about the future of the All Party Representative Committee. SCOPP coordinated the APRC sessions and SCOPP Director Rajiva Wijesinha or his designate was responsible for convening APRC meetings. Wijesinha told local media that the APRC would be given one month to complete its deliberations and submit its final report.

¶4. (U) APRC Chairman Tissa Vitharana told local press in early July that the final set of APRC proposals would include the establishment of state bodies for policymaking and monitoring of contentious national issues such as police, land, power and water, but would not include any "absolute or unchecked power devolution to the periphery." He said the central government would "decide on the policy framework" as well as "who will exercise control over the implementation of these powers within the provinces and in line with national needs." The APRC proposal will recommend a new constitution,

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which would abolish the executive presidency and install a Westminster form of government, and establish a constitutional court to deal with issues that might arise when the new constitution is implemented. He said that separation of powers between the center and provinces would be made clear in the new constitution and that each would be able to exercise their powers without interference. The new constitution would establish an upper house of parliament made up of eight representatives from each of the nine provinces to ensure that no legislation seeking to undo devolution could be passed.

NEW COMMITTEE SHOWS LITTLE PROMISE

¶5. (U) On July 3, President Rajapaksa convened the inaugural session of the Presidential Committee on Development and Reconciliation, which was attended by more than 20 political parties, including the Janatha Vimukthi Peramua (JVP), United National Party (UNP) and TNA. Officials from SCOPP, APRC, and the Finance and Planning Ministry and Foreign Ministry also participated. Embassy contacts say that the president's invitation for parties to participate came only one day in advance of the meeting, giving them almost no time to prepare and that no agenda was provided in advance. Opposition party contacts say the new committee was formed in response to domestic and international criticism of the government for failing to make progress on political reconciliation and that they do not expect it to achieve significant results.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The President's statement that he does not intend to pursue devolution until after his re-election casts doubt on the prospective outcomes of his new reconciliation committee. The interview itself, while widely covered in local press this week, has yet to generate much public reaction or debate. We may see some discussion of it in the weekend papers, which tend to include more analytical and opinion pieces. A senior UNP MP reiterated to Charge on July 10 the widely held view that the President will not pursue devolution ahead of the election for fear of jeopardizing the currently strong political support of his southern Sinhalese base. Vitharana's preview of the APRC's final proposals indicate that they are not confined to the contents or spirit of the 13th amendment, and may contain

elements, such as the abolishment of the executive presidency, which are likely to be non-starters with the Rajapaksa administration. Post will continue to impress on the GSL that meaningful progress toward power sharing, devolution and reconciliation should be a current, rather than future, priority.

MOORE